

TouchFax

TouchFax Provides The Ultimate In Place-Based Interactivity

By Allen Weiner, Editor

If you think of TouchFax Information Services, Inc., as a company that manufactures public fax machines, you have only part of the picture. In the rapidly growing arena of place-based media, TouchFax is creating products that will allow consumers the same sort of interactive capabilities as they will have with their home-based interactive appliances.

"We believe the information for the machine can be strategically designed for the location type so the type of services and the type of information that can be retrieved interactively on our terminals can be totally different from one machine to another," says John Massey, the machine's creator and chairman of the Lenexa, Kan.,-based company.

"We always will have a basic set of common services that are available on all machines," he adds. "But, particular machines will have unique sets of advertisements and promotions on them, as well as related services that relate to the type of people that frequent a particular type of location."

And locations are key to the TouchFax family of products. Massey believes they are best utilized in places where "a number of different types of users can interact with their desired and preferred telecommunications service." Airports, hotels, truck stops, apartment complexes and even supermarkets are ideal for these multifunctional, multimedia machines.

TouchFax hardware products include three models of public terminals used initially as pay-per-use fax machines. They also can provide other services such as word processing and high-quality copies in addition to its primary communications capability of phone, fax and computer. Service products include personal fax mailboxes and information services which may be accessed by TouchFax public terminals and any private fax machines.

The TF Series public terminals are location specific and are designed to meet the space in which they will reside. For example, a lower cost unit designed for lower traffic locations also has a smaller paper storage capacity and would require more frequent service calls if placed in a high traffic location.

All TouchFax terminals use proprietary



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software to create an easy-to-use visual control panel. This user interface to the machine is displayed on a touch-sensitive color video monitor which provides instructions to the user and on-screen buttons to operate the terminal functions.

Documents to be sent are scanned on a jam-proof flatbed scanning device which operates much like a standard copy machine. Payment for services is made by using credit card or other magnetic card such as a telephone calling card. The terminal provides a detailed printed receipt of the transaction for expense account record keeping.

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The TouchFax Electronic Library is a collection of information products organized by category. These information products are made available by combining information databases and high-resolution fax printer output with the ease of remote telephone communications. Information products are available on TouchFax public terminals and from any private fax machine.

On a TouchFax public terminal, the touchscreen provides an interactive dialog between the consumer and the information provider. For example, a consumer can select OAG FlightFax to get up-to-the-minute flight information, seat availability and fares. The consumer is guided through a series of video screens requesting their specific flight schedule. The TouchFax public terminal then sends the information via computer modem to OAG's database and a one-page personalized report is delivered to the TouchFax terminal by facsimile.

To access the TouchFax Electronic Library from your home or office requires a touch-tone telephone. A user responds to a series of audio prompts and directs the document to his home or office fax machine. For example, consumers can define the content of an up-to-the-minute special interest newsletter compiled from the news resources of *USA Today*.

Users also can request details of forecasters weather conditions in their destination city, maps and directions to specific locations, as well as city guides with suggestions on where to dine and what to see. Other services are oriented specifically toward entertainment and include popular business book summaries, personalized cartoon fax messages and event schedules.

In essence, TouchFax provides the future interactive appliance user a similar service to what he will be able to access with his Interactive Video Data Service terminal, touchscreen telephone or interactive cable device. So, home or away, the consumer can be interactive.

"The TouchFax is designed to emulate exactly what a person will be able to use in their homes," says Massey. "It's a system that will be deployed nationally and internationally that is designed to be a public terminal, as well as a service that goes into the home."

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TouchFax's TF750 is a free-standing kiosk with a high-resolution, 14-inch color touchscreen monitor, 386 microprocessor, high-volume laser printer, full-size keyboard and data port for modem and laptop connections. The TF450 is a built-in, wall-mounted unit that has an optional floor mount and offers the data ports for modem and laptop connections on an optional basis. The TF200 is a built-in, wall-mounted unit that offers a laser printer as an upgraded feature.

TouchFax offers two service products which adds to its flexibility—a fax mailbox service and electronic library. The TouchFax Mailbox is a centrally managed electronic service capable of storing fax messages. Mailbox subscribers are given a personal phone number to allow fax messages to be sent to their mailboxes, stored in the mailbox and retrieved at any time. To retrieve stored messages, the subscriber calls his mailbox number, enters a Personal Identification Number, enters the fax destination number and the system forwards the stored fax messages as instructed.